H.T. Kuist

The world God wants

STUDIES IN JEREMIAH

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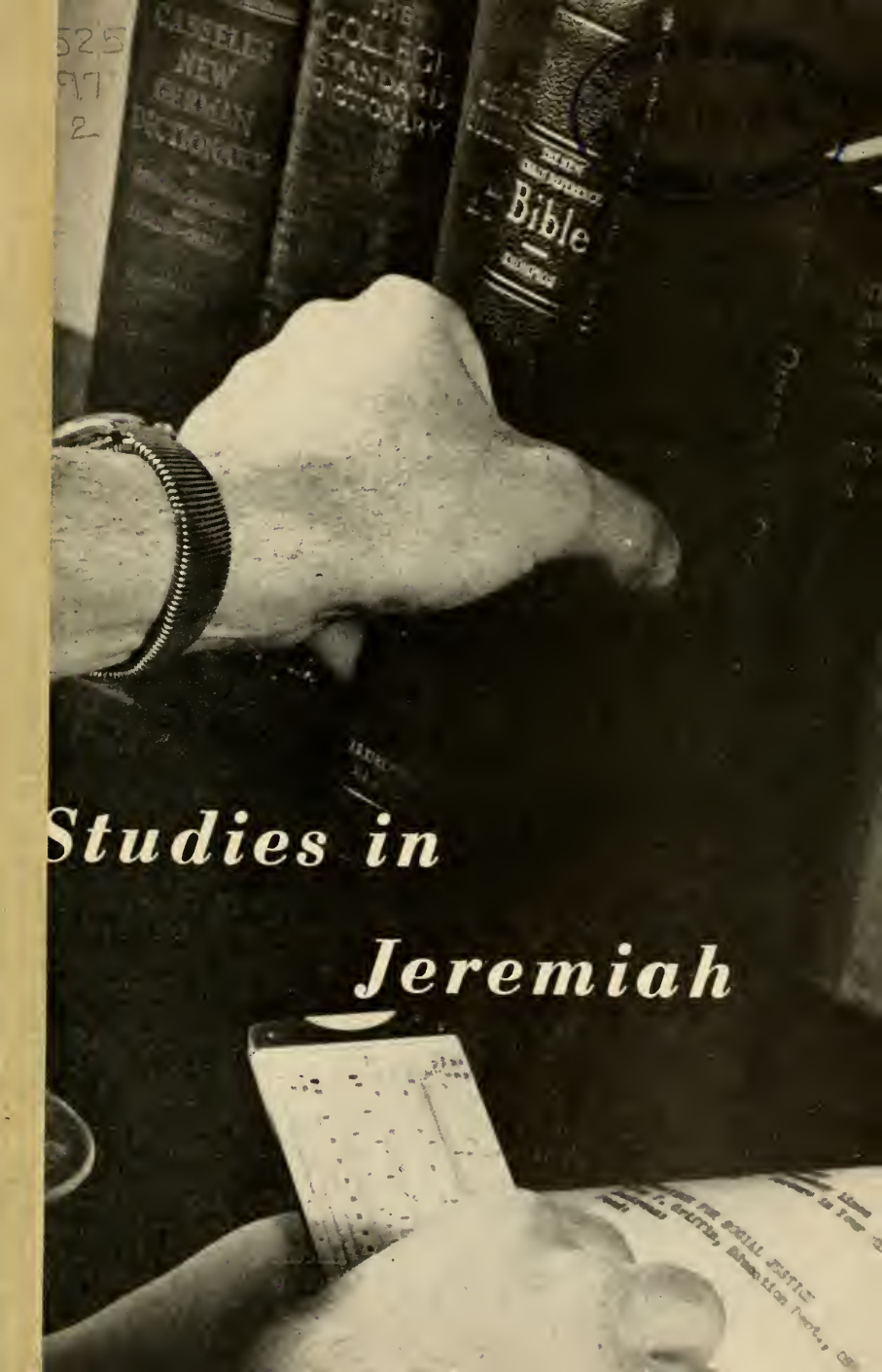

Studies in Jeremiah

THE WORLD GOD WANTS

Studies in Jeremiah

by HOWARD TILLMAN KUIST

Bible Study is always a rigorous discipline. This may be true because most of us would rather talk than listen, and Bible Study is listening to God. The following inductive questions are designed to induce a listening mood by encouraging first-hand observation of the Bible text, or by promoting personal reflection. These questions, in turn, should lead to first-hand sharing in the group discussions. The questions may be used also by the leaders to direct the consideration of the group.

It is not expected that any student will want to consider every question. The questions are sufficiently varied to appeal to a variety of interests. However, it is suggested that the questions relating to the historic situation be considered first; then those designed to help recognize the significance of Jeremiah's experience. The questions on the New Testament passages are designed to confront the Old Testament situation with the New Testament Gospel. Only so can the relevance of the Old Testament proclamation to the present-day situation of the Church truly be seen.

Introduction

The Old Testament Proclamation and the New Testament Gospel.

1. What deeds of God described in the Old Testament were used by Jeremiah to urge God's claims upon His people?

See, for example, Jeremiah 2:4-8; 7:12-15; 11:1-8; 16:14,15; 34:12-16; 35:12-17. Compare with Deuteronomy 4:1-40; 6:1-25; 8:1-20.

2. To what corresponding deeds did the New Testament apostles point?

See, for example, Acts 2:14-24, 25-36, 37-42; 7:1-53; 13:16-43.

3. Why did Martin Luther consider that God's calling and the "earthly obligation of work" are inseparably united?

4. Why does Einar Billing claim that our calling as Christians implies something beyond the sum of our immediate human duties? (See *Our Calling*, pp. 5-11.)

1. God Seeks and Finds a Voice

Jeremiah 1; Matthew 16:13-28

Jeremiah and the Historic Situation

Jeremiah 1:1-3: How is the moment of Jeremiah's call in 626 B.C. related to other significant events in Josiah's reign? (See II Kings 22,23; II Chronicles 34,35.)

Where is Anathoth (Jeremiah 1:1) and for what is this place notable? (Joshua 21:13-19; I Kings 2:26,27. See also I Kings 1:5-53.)

In view of Josiah's reforms, is it strange that the Anathoth priests should have opposed Jeremiah (Jeremiah 11:18-23)?

1:4-10: What personal touches, what word pictures, what symbols testify to the reality of Jeremiah's experience?

1:11,12: For almond tree, read "early-awake tree." What meaning did this spring-time experience have for Jeremiah?

1:13-17: What ominous threats are involved in Jeremiah's vision of the boiling cauldron?

1:18,19: What qualities of Jeremiah's character are suggested by the pictures of the fortified city, the iron pillar, and the brazen walls?

1:19: Of what other Bible characters or situations are you reminded by the words of God to Jeremiah, "I am with thee"?

The Significance of Jeremiah's Experience

What elements in Jeremiah's self-portrait (Chapter 1) make his sketch so striking? Which element do you consider to be the most striking?

What value has the symbolism of Jeremiah 1 for analyzing the various levels of the prophet's consciousness?

What were the sources of conflict in Jeremiah's personal life according to Chapter 1? What clues are suggested to resolve these conflicts?

How do the visions of Jeremiah in Chapter 1 indicate that he retained his consciousness, his moral judgment, and his power to think during the experiences attending his call?

How far does Jeremiah's character agree with the character of his visions? Why can no man have high visions and lead a low life?

How far would Jeremiah agree with Matthew Arnold's statement, "To tunes we did not call our being must keep chime"?

What human conditions must be met if a man is to hear the voice of God?

With what attempts to portray Jeremiah in art are you familiar? Michelangelo (Fresco of Sistine Chapel)? John Sargent (Frieze of the Prophets)? Frank Salisbury? Guy Rowe (*In Our Image*)? In which is he most faithfully portrayed?

How does Franz Werfel interpret Jeremiah's awareness of God? See *Hearken to the Voice* (Viking Press, 1938), Chapter 5: "The Voice Within and the Voice Without." In what sense can it be said that "the voice of the Lord had found the soul of a man for a sounding board" (p.97)?

Why is it that no prophet is acceptable in his own country? Compare Jeremiah 11:18-23 with Luke 4:16-30.

Why should some people have thought that Jesus was Jeremiah returned to life (Matthew 16:14)?

What advantages did the disciples, like Peter, have over Jeremiah, to understand God and His ways (Matthew 16:15-17)?

What certainties did Jesus promise Peter, which correspond to those which came to Jeremiah at the time of his call (Matthew 16:18-20)?

In what sense was Jeremiah's call as exacting for him as was Jesus' call to His disciples for total commitment (Matthew 16:21-28)?

Why was Peter not minding the things of God but the things of men, in his rebuke of Jesus?

According to Jeremiah 1 and Matthew 16:24-26, upon what does God place supreme value in human personality? Why?

How was the cross Jesus called his disciples to bear like or different from that of Jeremiah's?

What people do you know who have lost their "souls" by trying to save their lives? What others do you know who have saved their souls by being willing to lose their lives?

2. God's Expectations Are High

Jeremiah 26:1-19; 7:1-15; Luke 19:45-20:8

Jeremiah and the Historic Situation

Jeremiah 26:1-7: What was the intent of Jeremiah's temple sermon, and who were his hearers?

26:8-9: Why did his hearers resent what he said about Shiloh? (For Shiloh, see 1 Samuel 4:10-12; 22.)

26:10-15: What was the charge brought against Jeremiah and the essence of Jeremiah's defense before the princes?

26:16-19: By whom and how was Jeremiah vindicated?

What notes are added to the significance of Jeremiah's message in 7:1-15 not found in 26:1-19?

The Significance of Jeremiah's Experience

For what was Jeremiah pleading when he urged the people to walk in God's law (Torah) and to heed God's servants, the prophets (26:4)?

Why should Jeremiah have called the catchword of the priests about the Temple (7:4,8) "lying words"?

Why did Jeremiah insist that to amend their ways (7:3) the covenant people must relieve the oppressed, and protect the weak (7:6,7)?

Why is a faith like that advocated by the temple priests, which separates the worship of God from one's relations to his fellow men, no real faith?

A century before Jeremiah's time, Isaiah had proclaimed that God would protect the Holy City and its

Temple (Isaiah 31:4-9). Why should Jeremiah now have challenged this proclamation?

What did Jeremiah mean when he declared that the people had made God's house a "den of robbers" (7:8-11)?

In what sense could it be said that God had been "rising up early and speaking" (7:13; 26:5)?

What prejudices of the people had Jeremiah violated in his temple sermon? Why will a man "more easily burn down his own house than get rid of his prejudices" (Descartes)?

The Old Testament Situation in the Light of the New Testament Gospel

How is the situation faced by Jesus when he had entered Jerusalem and had cleansed the Temple like and unlike Jeremiah's (Luke 19:45-20:8)?

What is authority? What was Jeremiah's authority (Jeremiah 26:9,12)? What kind of authority is implied in the question addressed to Jesus by the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders (Luke 20:2)? What kind of authority did Jesus actually represent (Luke 20:8)? How does the parable of the vineyard give his answer (Luke 20:9-18)?

To what perils are people exposed who separate the so-called "sacred" from the "secular" in life, or who attempt to substitute "private mysticism" for "public obligation" before God?

Why must it be that "God is Lord of all or Lord not at all"?

What other examples in history can you call of individuals who like Jeremiah have dared to say, "But as for me, behold I am in your hand . . ." (Jeremiah 26:14)?

Why could neither Jeremiah nor Jesus afford to make a move at conciliation with their opponents?

When, if ever, can Christians compromise so as to avoid open conflict? On what matters can there be no compromise? How are Christians to decide?

3. God and the Nations

Jeremiah 25 and 46; Mark 12:13-17

At the fall of Ninevah, 612 B.C., the Assyrian empire was destroyed, never to rise again. Egypt made a new bid for world empire. Pharoah-necoh's mercenary legions marched northward. King Josiah of Judah, attempting to cut him off at Megiddo, perished (608 B.C.). The Egyptians continued northward. At Carchemish on the Euphrates, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon decisively defeated the Egyptians (605 B.C.). This was the fourth year of King Jehoiakim of Judah.

Jeremiah and the Historic Situation

According to Jeremiah 25:1,2 and 46:1,2, how are the prophet's messages dated in relation to this decisive battle (Carchemish)?

25:3-7: What is Jeremiah's primary concern at this critical moment? What does he mean by "return" and "dwell"?

25:8-11: Why did the prophet refer to Nebuchadnezzar as God's "servant"?

25:15: At this point in the Greek Version, Jeremiah chapters 46-51 are inserted. What nations are addressed in these chapters and how do they correspond to those mentioned in 25:15-29?

25:15-29? What does Jeremiah mean by passing "this cup of the wine of wrath" from nation to nation? How much of Jeremiah's world comes under the scope of this act?

25:30-38: What does Jeremiah consider God's "controversy with the nations" to be? And why does He press this controversy?

46:1-12: How does the prophet describe the situation before the battle of Carchemish? What does Pharaoh-necoh mean by his boast, "I will rise up, I will cover the earth"? How does Jeremiah answer him?

46:13-26: What vivid imagery does Jeremiah use to describe the Egyptian defeat?

The Significance of Jeremiah's Experience

In world crises, what factors beside the political are essentially involved? Which is the most important, and why? Which do governments usually consider most important? What did Jeremiah insist was most important, and why?

According to Jeremiah, what was wrong with his world? To what would he point as the real center of world crisis today?

What did Jeremiah claim God had already done to prevent the crisis in which his nation was involved (25:3-6)? Who is supposed to play the role of "prophet" in the world today?

How can "anger" (25:6,7), "wrath" (fury, A.V., 25:12), and "fierce anger" (25:37,38) be attributed to God? Are God's acts of judgment described by Jeremiah to be interpreted as retributive, deterrent, or reformatory, or neither?

What are the "imponderables" of any world crisis? How can they be detected, and how utilized?

From man's side, what do conscience, moral principle, prayer, courage, faith, contribute to surmounting a world crisis?

The Old Testament Situation in the Light of the New Testament Gospel

What were the Pharisees and Herodians attempting to accomplish by addressing the question about tribute to Jesus?

"And unto God the things that are God's"—Where did Jesus place the accent in his answer? What did he intend his questioners to understand by it? Why should they marvel at him?

According to Jesus and Jeremiah, what tribute does God expect? What right has He to claim it?

"That this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom"—How would Jesus, or Jeremiah, declare this is to be brought about?

In the light of Jesus and Jeremiah, how must our modern definitions of patriotism and internationalism be redefined?

4. God's New Covenant
Jeremiah 31:31-34; Mark 14:17-25

On the Meaning of Covenant in the Bible

The Hebrew word for Covenant, *berith,* is derived from an Akkadian word, "to bind," or "to fetter." A *berith,* therefore, suggests a binding or a bond.

Jeremiah 31:32: How is the historic bond between God and His people portrayed here by Jeremiah?

2:1-3: Why is Jeremiah's picture of the marriage-bond, to illustrate the position of God with respect to Israel, so appropriate?

3:1-5: How does the prophet vivify the tragic historical accompaniments of this relation? (Compare with Hosea 1-3.)

3:15-17; 18-20; 21-25: By what living examples does Jeremiah further illustrate the covenant relations of God to His people?

Jeremiah and the Historic Situation

Jeremiah 34: How does the behavior of the people of Jerusalem during the siege illustrate their infidelity to God?

Chapters 37,38,39: Why should Jeremiah have been considered to be a traitor? What was he really trying to accomplish?

Chapter 32: How does Jeremiah's purchase of the field during the siege symbolize his hopes for the future?

The Significance of Jeremiah's Experience

Jeremiah 31:31-34: How does Jeremiah contrast God's New Covenant to the Old?

How is one to interpret his words, "My law in their inward parts," and "in their heart will I write it"?

To what corporate experiences of God's people does the prophet point? To what individual privileges?

On what guarantee does God's New Covenant rest? How is this Covenant to be made effective?

How did the ruin of the nation drive Jeremiah to face the problem of the destiny of the individual in relation to God's Covenant?

The Old Testament Situation in the Light of the New Testament Gospel

How was the situation of Jerusalem under the Romans in Jesus' day like that of Jerusalem under the Babylonians in Jeremiah's day?

Why was the Passover (Mark 12:12-16) a particularly appropriate time for Jesus to observe a last supper with His disciples?

What ominous tensions disturbed the fellowship of the disciples with Jesus (Mark 12:17-31)?

How can the act of Jesus in instituting the Lord's Supper be regarded as fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy about the New Covenant?

How does an understanding of Jeremiah's life and work enable us to comprehend the world's need of Christ?

Why could not Israel's eternal destiny be closed with its political life?

How and why was Jesus Christ qualified to be the Mediator of the New Covenant?

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